

# Preparing ourselves for a future when the children want one...

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Human beings have always had feelings for their children. Societies and families have had visions of the future for their children. Here is an old American Indian Prayer

Great Spirit , Great spirit my grandfather,  
look upon these children with children of their own,  
that they may face the north wind  
and walk the good road to the day of peace

And this is what ABRAHAM LINCOLN had to say to his son's headmaster.

He will have to learn, I know, that all men are not just, all men are not true. But teach him also that for every scoundrel there is a hero; that for every selfish politician there is a dedicated leader. Teach him that for every enemy there is a friend. It will take time, I know , but teach him, if you can, that a dollar earned is of far more value than five found. Teach him to learn to lose and also to enjoy winning, steer him away from envy., if you can; teach him the secret of quiet laughter. Let him learn early that the bullies are the easiest to lick; Teach him, if you can, the wonder of books but also give him quiet time to ponder the eternal mystery of birds in the sky, bees in the sun and flowers on a green hillside. In school, teach him it is far more honourable to fail than to cheat. Teach him to have faith in his own ideas, even if every one tells him they are wrong. Teach him to be gentle with gentle people, and tough with the tough. Try to give my son the strength not to follow the crowd when every one is getting on the band wagon. Teach him to listen to all men, but teach hi m also to filter all he hears on a screen of truth, and take only the good that comes through.

Teach him, if you can, how to laugh when he is sad. Teach him there is no shame in tears. Teach him to scoff at cynics and to beware of too much sweetness. Teach him to to sell his brawn and brain to the higher bidders, but never to put a price tag on his heart and soul. Teach him to close his ears to a howling mob and to stand and fight if he thinks he's right.

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Treat him gently, but do not cuddle him, because only the test of fire makes fine steel. Let him have the courage to be impatient; let him have the patience to be brave. Teach him always to have sublime faith in himself, because then he will always have sublime faith in mankind. This is a big order, but see what you can do. He is such a fine little fellow, my son.

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In the twentieth century we hear a different flavour of things that an adult may say to a young one.

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Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?

Oh, where have you been, my darling young one?

I've stumbled on the side of twelve misty mountains,

I've walked and I've crawled on six crooked highways, I've stepped in the middle of seven sad forests,

I've been out in front of a dozen dead oceans,

I've been ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard, And it's a hard, and it's a hard, it's a hard, and it's a hard, And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.

Bob Dylan

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Adults hold the soil of today, and this is the soil from where tomorrow has to spring.. If the adults of tomorrow, the children of today were to ask us, 'Tell me O' adult, what can I look forward to?'

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Would we say 'My dear, I would like to say that you have rosy tomorrows, in this paradise of hues and colours and creatures. You have golden relationships to look forward to and magical possibilities. But I am afraid this can't be said. Men have ravaged this planet with their dreams and their toils. They have ravaged each other with their minds. The beauty of songs is drowned by the clatter of man made things. And far more dangerous, men everywhere appear to believe that this is the right way to live. This my child is the world you will inherit.

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And the young one could say 'Surely you exaggerate O adult. Things can't be so bad. I see smiles and hear laughter. Surely you adults and those before you could not have let things come to such a pass.

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Would we say, 'Yes things are not as bad as that. There is the good and there is the bad. The good things are that there is enough food. The bad is that man does not know how to distribute it. The good news is that there is a splendid diversity of life and beauty on this planet. The bad news is that there are few eyes and fewer hearts to meet this richness. There is a wealth of hope in human hearts but they turn sour in human minds. We say the animals and birds and fishes are important but we use them and their numbers are dying.

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So my young friend, Yes there are many fine ideas and many dreams in the minds of adults. But there is also a curious tragedy. Man has learnt to live in two worlds simultaneously, the world of noble ideas and then that of the most corrupt base actions. We talk of progress, but quality of life and relationships have not improved, probably become starker. We speak of need to protect forests and continue to lead ecologically unsustainable lives. And if the young were to say, 'why then did you bring me to this earth? Was it to meet this awful situations? Or was it an accident of lust? Is this the best gift to your children and grandchildren?'

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What would we say? Would we be silent? We could say some things surely. Of course we would need to get off any pedestals we may be sitting on.

- My young friend, we have learnt a few deep lessons for tomorrow. We have struggled, may be not too well to live them. But in the time we have we will join you and share with you these lessons.

- We have learnt that more is not better than less. In fact finding out what one needs is the answer. Also we need far less than we think we do. A bigger house or more wealth has not made a happier man.

- We have learnt that abundance can be turned into scarcity. Air, water, forests wildlife have all shrunk, thanks to the way we have taken them for granted. Finding a way of life where we do not take things for granted is the answer, but live with respect, if not reverence for the bounties of sunlight, fresh water , air.

- We have learnt that human beings know little about love. To most of us love is attachment. There is great boredom born of familiarity and then great emptiness. We need to ask, you and I, what love means. We need to ask also what brings dignity and beauty. The less man knows about these things, louder has been the rhetoric.

- We have learnt painfully that we need to rediscover our legs. Cars and other transport leave behind ghostly graveyards, fill the earth with smoke and ruin. Time and speed are things we have chased for the past 200 years. How much do we need to travel and how? Our legs need to find strength again and we need to discover again that small steps can take us far. That small is truly beautiful.

- We have learnt that religious beliefs while they are supposed to bring people together, seem to carry seeds of division. That religion is different from religious life. We need to learn to live a religious life.

- Our young child may continue. `I feel happy to hear all this and see some direction. But tell me is all this only for me,, for the future? Are you telling me what I need to do? What are you, the adult going to do? Are you only going to tell me to do things which you are not able to do?

- What will we say?

- Will it be `My child I am tired and quite set in my ways. It is very difficult for me to change. So this is the best I can offer. Advice from the sidelines.'

- Or will it be : "My child you have asked a difficult question. I see that we are both in the same boat psychologically. We both have habits and patterns. And I was a child not too long ago.

- I am willing to change. I feel afraid as I say this. And I will walk with you. We all have to learn a new way of living. And I might as well begin now."

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